The In-Ministry MDiv
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Abstract

What would happen if the Master of Divinity and the first ministerial call took place concurrently, with students engaging in apprenticeship, classroom learning, and reflective practice simultaneously through a coordinated in-ministry MDiv? This article explores that question and proposes implications for practice in theological education. The article presents a theoretical framework based in leadership development literature, a survey of experience-oriented MDiv programs in today's seminaries, and a case study on a current pilot initiative.

Introduction: Why Might an In-Ministry MDiv Matter?

Every year, we see more of them: new MDiv students who are already working in ministry. Perhaps they were licensed for ministry, serving faith traditions with no expectation, placed upon them by others, they would go to seminary, - and soon they realized that ministry requires knowledge and preparation. Perhaps they never considered ministry but landed a staff position at a church, only to discover a strangely-warmed feeling that they were in the right place and did not want to leave; they stumbled into ministry and did not want to come up against glass ceilings throughout their ministry careers due to lack of higher education.

In the 1950s at the seminary I serve, Andover Newton Theological School, students routinely blended their theological studies with ministry in churches before field education was invented, let alone required. They often served as youth ministers where they tended to the young people in congregations, which made sense considering that the typical 1950s seminarian was close in age to youth group members. It was in basketball court conversations on Sunday afternoons between faculty members and students, coming back from their youth ministry setting raising theological questions, when the Andover Newton faculty began to think about how to incorporate reflective practice into theological studies, and thus a new program – field education – was born.

Flash back a previous 150 years. Andover Seminary was founded in 1808 and merged with Newton in the 1930s. The best-known motivation behind its founding as the first independent graduate school of any kind in North America was that a faction of faculty members at Harvard broke away, distressed about a theological fissure that we now see marked the beginning of the "Unitarian Controversy." Another motivation behind Andover's founding – and perhaps a more urgent one at the time – was the need for a supplement to the apprenticeship model for pastoral ministry education. In eighteenth century New England, some young men went to college and then apprenticed to be pastors, borrowing their mentor's libraries, learning through doing, and reflecting.[1] A graduate-level theological education supplemented the apprenticeship, which was restrictive based on whatever limitations the mentor might have had, and which did not include the peer-based learning that was possible in an environment where seminarians were surrounded by other

[1] Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *A School of the Church: Andover Newton across Two Centuries* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008). 8.

seminarians.[2] Andover Seminary began as an embedded institution within Phillips Academy, where young men could come away from the congregation and learn together before being sent back out into it. This movement coincided with growing influence in the US from British and other forms of European higher education that frowned on practical, skills-based education and insisted that the best learning happened when young men were in a controlled environment, separate from the real workaday world. Andover's model led to a more learned clergy, but one could argue that it overcorrected. By pulling men fully out of the congregation during three crucial years of development, they gained, but also lost a great deal that field education and clinical pastoral education later had to retrieve.

Today, students are different from one another, to say the least. To expect that each of them will make progress through seminary the same way is too much to ask. To expect that the seminary can provide limitless options for varied paths through seminary is also unrealistic. In some cases, theological schools give students ample freedom to blend seminary with the ministry settings of their choosing, but in doing so they leave it to students to integrate their church-based employment and their seminary-based education. Considering that the students in question have no ministry experience or theological education when they start out, to expect them to engage in curriculum design to put in place connective tissue between experience and classroom-based study is not just unfair; it is absurd.

Seminary faculties today must consider the theological curriculum in a new way, where *outcomes* serve as the plumb line, because the *process* of learning requires new forms of flexibility in the twenty-first century. One form of flexibility is what I will describe as "In-Ministry MDivs."

This article will provide a theoretical framework for an in-ministry curriculum, describe models through which such a curriculum might be achieved, outline the pilot Co-Operative MDiv at Andover Newton Theological School and preliminary implications for practice arising from it, and recommend future areas of research and experimentation to further develop this model for ministry education.

Theoretical Framework

Review of Literature

Edwin Friedman, Rabbi and pioneer in connecting congregational leadership with systems theory, defined innovations this way: "Innovations are new answers to old questions; paradigm shifts reframe the question, change the information that is important, and generally eliminate previous dichotomies."[3] To create an in-ministry MDiv would be an educational innovation that would eliminate dichotomies. Before questioning them, these dichotomies must be described. They are so entrenched as to often be taken for granted, as though they were defined by physics rather than being historic institutional expressions of theological education.

The first dichotomy to be recognized when considering an in-ministry MDiv is the age-old division between education on theory and education for practice in preparing for professional

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[2] Charles R. Foster, Lisa Dunhill, Lawrence Goleman, and Barbara Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2006). 196.

[3] Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 1999). 37.

competence. In an article entitled “Four Pedagogical Mistakes: Mea Culpa,” Edward Farley writes of four ways in which he and others reinforced barriers between theoretical and practical theological education. Those four mistakes, by his definition, are (1) treating theology as a primarily academic pursuit, which builds obsolescence into theology itself; (2) considering the primary skill of academic theology to be the study of written texts, when Christianity was not historically first captured in books; (3) focusing on clarification of doctrines rather than questioning the inherent idolatry of religion itself; and (4) teaching theology as though to expose it to life situations would corrupt it. Farley writes that the institutional response in seminaries and divinity schools to these pedagogical mistakes has not been to rethink the dysfunctional epistemology behind them, but to add faculty and courses.[4] Elsewhere, Nicholas Wolterstorff writes of those added faculty, departments, and courses (namely, departments like the one Andover Newton named “Church and Ministry”) that their appended nature placed them in a second-class status that ultimately served to reinforce the dichotomies between theory and practice.[5]

Many have written about the way higher education’s disconnect between instruction on theory versus practice has played out in theological education in particular. As German universities sought to interpret a Greek ideal of the life of the mind, they placed distance between lived experience and contemplation in such a way that the contemplative was placed on the pedestal as a true intellectual.[6] As scholars have engaged the question of how adults learn, however, they have uncovered the damage done to education in the modern era based on this false dichotomy. First, learners will not remember what they do not apply in real life. As Scott Cormode writes in *Making Spiritual Sense*: *Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters*, that which we do not process, we lose.[7] Second, there is no clear cognitive distinction between learning an idea and learning a skill. Both forms of learning require information, reflection, and integration.[8]

Finally, there is no determinative reason why a professional in ministry must have education first, before serving. Justo Gonzales writes,

> For most of us, theological studies are a preparation for the ordained ministry, much as medical studies are a preparation for the practice of medicine. For this reason, many of our discussions regarding theological education have to do with the academic requirements for ordination, how to help pastors be more effective, and so forth. All of this may be very important, but it is grounded on a misunderstanding as to the main reason why theology is

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[4] Edward Farley, "Four Pedagogical Mistakes: A *Mea Culpa*," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 8(4) (2005): 200-203.

[5] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "To Theologians: From One Who Cares About Theology but Is Not One of You," *Theological Education* 40 (2) (2005): 79-92.

[6] Palmer, Parker J. The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990. Reprint, 1999. 6.

[7] Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006). 9.

[8] Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1974). 12.

> to be studied. Theological studies are not the specialty of the ordained ministry, like medical studies are the specialty of physicians, but rather the way in which the church and all its members, both jointly and individually, express our love for God, as the commandment says, with all our minds. When believers study scripture, we do not do this because it is an ordination requirement, but because in it we find the word of God for our lives and for the life of the church. One should study theology, not in order to pass an examination but in order to learn how to see everything—including the life of the church—in the light of the word and action of God.[9]

What Gonzales lifts up in his recent history of theological education is that theological education benefitted from its interplay with other forms of higher education. This has been especially true in the midst of a shrinking jurisdiction for pastoral ministry, where ministry needed to keep pace with other professional fields for the sake of societal credibility.[10] But to go too far in modeling theological education after professional education in law and medicine – which are both younger forms of professional education than seminaries – neglects the unique way in which theological education plays a role in the life of not just professionals, but believers. When considering that all Christians are called to grow in their faith through learning, one can see that segmenting the learner away from the community in theological education is damaging to the progress of the learner. Gonzales writes that the church existed for 1500 years without seminaries, and although the church has been generally more effective and peaceful during eras where clergy were learned, religious leadership has been formed for the most part in-community, by communities.

Theological schools are not effective when they are isolated from the world around them; in fact, they cannot rightly be called theological schools if they function as islands. Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools Daniel Aleshire writes,

> Theological schools generate more than the sum of learning, teaching, and research. When learning for religious vocation, teaching ministers and church members, and theological research are done in close connection with each other, over time, in communities of common interest, the result is fundamentally different than if these activities are done separately. Each is enhanced when performed in the context of others, and a school provides a singular context that brings them together in both expectation and practice.[11]

In the 1800s, Andover Seminary took men out of the pure apprenticeship setting and put them in school together. Many good things came of this change. In the 1900s, Andover and Newton Seminaries, which during that century merged, mimicked other institutions of higher learning in the way it constructed its educational model, and my predecessors took some creative steps in

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[9] Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015). 118.

[10] Gilbert R. Rendle, "Reclaiming Professional Jurisdiction: The Re-Emergence of the Theological Task of Ministry," *Theology Today* 59(3) (2002): 408-420.

[11] Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008). 163.

reintroducing practice (field education, CPE). In the twenty-first century, Andover Newton and other seminaries are at a crossroads where they must discern how to even more deliberately locate education within experience for the sake of learning for entrepreneurship. The most effective way to educate a leader for a quickly-changing field in a quickly-changing culture is to teach them how to learn through and from experience, or "reflective practice."

By no means would I claim that my predecessors at Andover Newton had it wrong when they adopted the practices of the wider academy and appropriated other professional education models, rather than creating a form of theological professional education that was in a class by itself. Surely, it is because of its capacity to blend in with other disciplines that Andover Newton survived and formed graduates who have influenced society. Will Willimon writes that one of the most difficult dimensions of ministry is functioning within the cultural clash between professions and other-worldliness of ministry.[12] Schools like the one I serve, and like the church itself, survived in part through isomorphism with the culture surrounding it.[13] But that culture is changing, and the way in which theological education must adapt to change is both similar to and different from the adjustments that must take place in other professional fields.

Theological education suffers in a cultural context where the public does not trust institutions. In Gregory Jones and Kevin Armstrong's *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry*, we read,

> Individuals, we are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) told, need to resist collectives, those impersonal structures that seek conformity, impose rigidity, and stifle creativity and freedom of expression. The notion of the individual, especially as it is defined over and against conformity, is descriptively false and normatively dangerous.[14]

Scholar of institutional culture Hugh Heclo goes on to say, "It is a stalemate between the distrust that various institutions have richly earned and the vague appreciation of institutional values that makes possible our sense of betrayal when that has happened."[15] Churches and theological schools must function in order to meet society's needs for educated religious leaders. Late twentieth century religious institutions found survival more difficult amidst eroding trust. Early twenty-first century educational institutions are discovering similar skepticism about their value and importance. Such distrust weakens institutions, and thus one can see the early arc of a self-fulfilling prophesy: institutions that are not trusted become weaker, and thus less competent and worthy of trust.

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[12] Will Willimon. *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002. 22.

[13] Cormode, 45.

[14] L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 62.

[15] Hugh Heclo, "Our Modern Impasse," in *On Thinking Institutionally (On Politics)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

Like other forms of professional education, theological education also suffers under the weight of the staggering complexity of twenty-first century culture. To create a context-based educational program is already a challenge, considering the degree of difficulty associated with determining credit, qualified supervision, tuition, and accreditation. Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, preeminent scholars on learning for professions, acknowledge that even for schools that have the will to blend reflective practice into a curriculum seamlessly, the complexity of organizing a context-centered educational program could be enough to scuttle one before it could get off the ground. In a chapter entitled "Contextualizing the Curriculum: The Communal and Integrative Practices of Theological Education," Alice Rogers and David Jenkens write that contextual education means spanning and bridging multiple contexts in a century, postmodern world.

> [Contextual education is] complicated work given there are many contexts that require, if not compete for, attention. The multiplicity of contexts include the classroom itself, which is located within the broader contexts of the academy and the church; the particular site where the student is in ministry, such as a local church, homeless shelter, hospice, or college chaplaincy program; the local culture (it matters whether these experiences happen in the Bible-Belt South or the Northwest, whether they occur in a working class, Hispanic, Pentecostal, urban community, or an affluent African American suburban congregation); and the dominant culture and society of the United States with its formative values (individualism, materialism, etc.). Even the historic milieu functions as context (Is the global economy in crisis such that people are losing their jobs and afraid of the future? Is the world at war? Does it matter that it is post 9/11?). Then there are the contexts of the students themselves.[16]

Therefore, complexity itself is a barrier to the reconceptualization of a curriculum around ministerial practice. Those who would need to invent such a curriculum were not trained as teacher/mentors, and the communities they serve were not formed with the value of training up leaders, for they sent such prospective leaders away to receive education. Gonzalez writes that theological education's future will require the academy and church to "train mentors in the task of theological reflection and pastoral practice—which does not mean only the practice of the pastor, but even more the pastoral practice of the entire community of faith."[17] And yet those prospective mentors were themselves formed to resist supervision[18] as they play out the Western veneration of individualism. They teach and learn through transmission of facts rather than cognitive reframing.

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[16] David O. Jenkens and P. Alice Rogers, "Contextualizing the Curriculum: The Communal and Integrative Practices of Theological Education," in *Equipping the Saints: Best Practices in Contextual Theological Education*, ed. David O. Jenkins and P. Alice Rogers (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2010). 86-87.

[17] González. 129.

[18] Kenneth Pohly, *Transforming the Rough Places*, 2nd ed. (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2001). 14.

Argyris and Schön argue that the effective mentor today engages in more coaching than teaching. "From time to time, these individuals may teach in the conventional sense, communicating information, advocating theories, describing examples of practice. Mainly, however, they function as coaches whose main activities are demonstrating, advising, questioning, and criticizing."[19] All seem to recognize that adults learn best through a combination of experience, reflection, and information, and yet the central structures of higher and professional education take their cue from the transmission of information alone, which happens to be the one dimension of learning that can happen without the benefit of a school.

Schön proposes a form of professional education he calls a practicum, and what he has elsewhere called "reflection-in-action."[20] In such a practicum, the learner gathers information and skill, learns to think like a professional (in this case, think like a minister), and learns to reframe problems so as to recreate the field into which one is being trained. Argyris and Schön propose that the educational structure that could serve as an expression of the practicum would include low-risk opportunities for a student to try on the profession, as well as access to coaches who can help them reflect and learn.

Coaches would lead students through discovery and diagnoses of problems, inventions of solutions, and monitoring those solutions toward enhanced effectiveness. Practically, the structure should be relatively short when it comes to the amount of time it should take to earn a degree, and easily adaptable by students who are different from each other. The shorter degree program would make sense only if an assumption of lifelong learning were built into the profession, which is a topic for another day. As stated earlier, an in-ministry model is anything but simple or one-size-fits-all. Stressed institutions that do not enjoy great trust from the public will have difficulty implementing such programs. The programmatic lacuna may account for the dearth of theoretical study on what such a program would involve. New programs emerge out of experimentation that is not possible when programs are too costly and complicated to implement.

Educational Model

The theoretical framework undergirding an in-ministry MDiv must take the following dimensions into account:

1. Ministry education never had to take place outside the faith community context. It did, and that is and was good, but ministry education departed the faith community context in order to conform with societal expectations for higher education. In this way, ministry education became separate from the faith community due to cultural change, and leaders in ministry education must consider reintegration for the same reason: cultural change. Dark lines between ministry as a profession and theological learning must be blurred.
2. To learn a skill and to learn an idea are not inherently different actions. Furthermore, both skills and ideas are better learned and retained when reflected upon or implemented quickly, in the midst of living and working.

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[19] Argyris and Schön. 39.

[20] Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1987). 39.

3. Effective education in the professions includes low-risk experimentation, theoretical learning, and reflective practice.
4. Effective education in the professions responds to the complex and numerous contexts from which students come, in which they learn, and to which they go through creating programs that are adaptable and customizable. The institutional stress associated with such nimble customizability is not to be underestimated.

It is with these factors in mind that this article proposes a model for an in-ministry MDiv.

As one can see, this curriculum is designed for a particular institution, and such must be the case in any effective curriculum design. Curriculum flows from learning objectives, which flow from institutional missions. This particular curriculum design follows Andover Newton's mission to educate inspiring religious leaders who are deeply rooted in Christian faith and radically open to what God is doing in the world now.

Distinctive features include a two-year residency in a faith community that spans the middle section of the three-year program. The spring before studies begin, students would learn about engaging in reflective practice through a seminar on vocational discernment. They would begin their discernment processes with their denominations and engage the psychological testing required by those denominations. They would interview for placements. Their residencies would be paid positions as members of ministerial staffs, or as parts of teams of students serving small congregations under the supervision of a regional mentor. Students would then engage in a combination of theoretical learning, experimentation in the ministerial role, and reflection for the sake of spiritual and professional formation.

Those forms of learning would take place in classroom contexts, in the field, and online, but the question about which setting will serve which subject will not be answered based on old paradigms of theory/practice split. Instead, the question will be, "Where could the student learn this dimension of ministry most effectively?" If study of sacred text would be best retained if learned through an intensive week of theory with a Bible scholar, followed by supervised learning with the mentor/coach with the help of a curriculum guide provided by that scholar, those modalities would be adopted. The expertise of the mentoring minister and the expertise of the professor would each be taken seriously, but the learning modality would not be shackled to old paradigms that led to what Farley calls a hierarchy of disciplines, which place the practitioner at the bottom of the intellectual hierarchy. After the two-year residency, the student would have time to transition out of the by-design lower-risk setting of the residency into ministry, with the help of colleagues and further mentoring.

The educational model described in this article seeks to address some of the key obstacles to sustainable theological education toward a learned and effective ministry, namely seminary debt. The model addresses seminary debt through the following distinguishing features:

- Students engage in meaningful discernment as well as careful vetting of suitability for ministry before they have invested any money in theological education.
- Students earn a living wage while in seminary.
- Students receive tuition assistance from their ministry employment settings.
- Students graduate with little debt and are thus free to pursue ministry opportunities at entry-level wages.

- Students graduate with sufficient experience and capacity for reflective practice to serve in solo ministry positions without oversight from a senior colleague which would otherwise limit them to multi-staff settings.

Today's Models

It is possible that the educational model proposed here is infeasible for any variety of reasons. Are there sufficient faith communities able to support student learning to provide enough leaders for the church's future needs? How would the financial model play out with congregations of limited financial means, or for students with no capacity to contribute at least something to tuition? Do today's seminary students enter their studies with sufficient catechetical knowledge[21] to enter a ministry context so quickly upon arriving in seminary? All of these critiques are valid, and surely far more are waiting around the corner. That said, institutional stress is the primary obstacle to trying new ideas of any kind, and institutional stress grows the longer seminaries cling to old models. Some seminaries, including the small sample described below, are attempting to blend experience with Master of Divinity programs in new ways. The following is a summary of some of the in-ministry Master of Divinity experiments taking place in theological education today. (figure available online).

Pilot Initiative at Andover Newton Theological School: The Cooperative MDiv

Andover Newton has partnered in theological education with Hancock Church in Lexington, UCC, for over 50 years. In 2013, Andover Newton received support through a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. to expand the student positions at Hancock into residencies that are nearly full-time and concurrent with the Master of Divinity. This pilot initiative, now in its second year, is demonstrating promise as a recruitment and retention tool for students who otherwise could not engage in seminary and ministry at the same time. Through this program, students enter ministry positions at Hancock Church simultaneously with the advent of their theological educations. Each receives a portfolio of responsibilities and a living wage from the congregation (in expensive Greater Boston, this means approximately $25K annually). The church pays the School in order that each student might receive a scholarship that accounts for approximately 1/3 of tuition, and the School provides financial aid for much of the remaining tuition.

Each student is supervised by a minister on the staff, either the Senior or Associate minister, and the Senior Minister mentors both students in directed studies offered in collaboration with a member of the Andover Newton faculty. The faculty member, in this case Professor Adam W. Hearlson, provides program oversight to the program with an eye toward the overarching outcome goals of the MDiv program. This partnership is old, but the program itself – with its sweeping scope – is new. Students in the program, through formative evaluation discussions, have expressed that their learning experiences so far mirror the four distinctive practices named in this article for effective in-ministry learning.

1. *Ministry education can and does take place in the ministry context.*

Andover Newton's pilot Cooperative MDiv considers Hancock Church its primary location, although the School has begun to partner with a congregation in Minnesota in a distance-learning

[21] Jones and Armstrong. 114.

mode for the pilot. Although students take courses on campus, they engage directed studies with their mentors, and the mentors collaborate with the liaison for the program on the Andover Newton faculty. The church serves as classroom and laboratory, a workplace and spiritual home. Students currently at Hancock describe the flow of their weeks as Coop students as days built around the Hancock church calendar, much more than the Andover Newton academic calendar. As one student described an ordinary week, "You get accosted on Sunday at coffee hour, you think about it on Tuesday at staff meeting, and then you hash out the implications of it on Thursday in class. And then next Sunday you put those things into practice."

2. *To learn a skill and to learn an idea are not inherently different actions, and learning only sticks when reflected upon in real time.*

In their directed study, Hancock Coop students are reading about ministerial leadership in consultation with their mentor, the Senior Minister, Rev. Dr. Paul Shupe. They share vivid illustrations of the way in which they see concepts from their reading come to life in their ministries. One student, who studied for a full year before entering the Coop pilot program, described the difference this way:

> I remember sitting in all my classes, and the professor would say something or I would read something in a book, and I would think, "That is something that I want to hold onto. I can't wait to put that into practice; putting it into the time capsule for later." So I'd write it in the margins, put a little star next to it, and then a semester later I would look through that and see that thing and wonder, "So, what was that?" And I assume that in the moment there was gold … but because it was for later, because it lived in a notebook, it lost its cohesiveness to ministry. Whereas at Hancock I don't have to do that … because there is almost this immediate turn around in what I'm learning and working on and then how I'm putting it into practice.

Some subjects will be more amenable to fully-contextual learning than others, especially when one considers the level of expertise and current knowledge faculty members are expected to bring to their students as opposed to what a mentor-pastor is called to read and know. That said, students reported that their retention of all forms of learning has improved through their Coop MDiv experiences, not just their so-called practical courses and readings.

3. *Effective education in the professions includes low-risk experimentation, theoretical learning, and reflective practice.*

The first Coop student at Hancock Church was called upon to engage in pastoral ministry related to a tragic death in the congregation within days of beginning his role. In the setting of a midcourse evaluation, both he and his mentor reflected on how much he grew through that experience, and how much he has grown since that time. Although the intensity was certainly high, the protection that the mentor was able to provide empowered the student to engage, rather than standing back and observing. Said Rev. Shupe,

> I would say that a big reason why this works is because the students in this model are getting to lead without having to be responsible for leadership. There is a buffer. The leadership of the congregation is ultimately my responsibility … and we lean on these guys to do a lot of

> the work, and they're leading very much concretely, but we talk about how they're leading behind the scenes. And that gives them opportunities to really be engaged with the task without bearing ultimate responsibility for it.

Both theoretical learning and reflective practice are built into the model, lowering anxiety around evaluation – it is simply part of the job – and taking advantage of ministry experiences as content for exploration, much like a text might provide for classroom-based learning.

4. *Effective education in the professions responds to complexity through nimbleness.*

The importance of offering a Cooperative MDiv that minimizes debt and maximizes relevant ministry experience for the sake of future employability was best summarized by the program's first student, now in his second year:

> [The best argument for the Coop model is] I can't imagine doing it the other way. The problem is that I wouldn't be able to do it the other way. If I wasn't working in a church, and also having financial help, I would have had to come [to Andover Newton] and take classes one by one. As a young person out of college and with tons of debt and no money, I would sign up for one class, I wouldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel, and after two semesters, I would be like, "This isn't going to work," and I'd move onto something else. So just getting in the door, and staying in the door and having a purpose is the first thing … and the other thing is … I don't know if being in a classroom is what makes you a good minister. It's the art as opposed to the science part of it. There are so many things that you can only learn through experience. And a year of Field Ed., while it's awesome and absolutely necessary, it just isn't not enough time to put anything into practice. You're like stopping by, swinging through, there's no time. … From all the materials I've read, ministry isn't a one year thing. You can barely even take the temperature in a year. It takes four, five, ten years to really minister to people, and getting in there as soon as possible is essential.

Implications for Future Research

This article has made the case for exploration of educational models that blend the MDiv with the first ministerial call through integrated models, bridging faith communities and seminaries. More must be learned about the role of the mentor pastor and the role of the seminary professor in such a model. Market research on available, appropriate faith communities and suitable candidates would enhance experimentation by lowering the unknowns that give institutions pause. Coordination of investigation of such models with both denominations and theological schools would be essential, in that some denominations have already explored in-ministry alternatives to formal theological education quite extensively. Finally, investigation on technological platforms that could enhance in-ministry learning by connecting students and professors and mentors from across the country would be forward-looking and worthwhile.

For now, we are on the vessel that we are building, maintaining today's degree programs while experimenting with new models, all while trying not to rock the boat in a way that harms students or disables institutions. And yet considering that ministry education took place in faith community contexts for centuries before it took place in schools, considering ways to reengage

church and academy at this moment seems less risky than some educational models that are entirely untested in Christian history.

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